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THE  
STORY OF  
VAN CORTLANDT

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The Story of  
Van Cortlandt

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Van Cortlandt

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THE STORY  
OF  
VAN CORTLANDT

by  
KATHARINE M. BEEKMAN  
and  
NORMAN MORRISON ISHAM, F. A. I. A.

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THE VAN CORTLANDT HOUSE MUSEUM



# THE STORY OF VAN CORTLANDT

By KATHARINE M. BEEKMAN

North of the Island of Manhattan, and across the Harlem River lies a long flat valley, bounded on one side by the wooded hills which, crossing the state boundary, form the mountain ridges of Connecticut, and on the other by those which gradually rise into the Highlands, bordering the Hudson. Watering this valley is a brook, known as Tibbits brook, but called Mosholu by the Indians, which, as it approaches the Spuyten Duyvil Creek, loses itself in ground so low that it is wet by the tide when high; and just at the head of this Marsh stands Van Cortlandt House, in Van Cortlandt Park.

This valley was originally the hunting ground of a tribe of Indians, members of the Mohican family, who had settled in a large village, near where Yonkers now stands, on the bank of a stream which there emptied into the Hudson. They called the valley Neppenhaem, and used its flat fertile centre to grow corn, while the wooded hills were cleared of underbrush, for hunting. They were friendly Indians until 1642-43, when, through the mismanagement of Governor Kieft, there was a rising of the tribes, and of the inhabitants of Westchester, called by the Dutch, "Oost Dorp," or East Village; some fled to Fort Orange, or Albany, and some to Holland, while many were massacred, among whom

was the well known Anne Hutchinson and her family. The settlements on the west side were all destroyed, and the county abandoned.

In 1645 a peace conference was held in New Amsterdam. Governor Kieft met the chiefs of the different tribes, the pipe of peace was smoked, and, before they left, the Indians were all given handsome presents. To buy these presents, Kieft borrowed the money from Adrian Van der Donck, a gentleman who had come over with Killian Van Rensselaer in 1641, and was at this time the Schout Fiscaal, or High Sheriff, in charge of that patroon's property, at Rensselaerwyck near Albany. Van der Donck desired to be a patroon himself, and had tried to get a grant of land near Catskill; but this debt from Kieft gave him another opening, and in 1646, just before the arrival of Stuyvesant and the resignation of Kieft, he bought from the Indians, and had confirmed to him by a grant from the Governor, land, embracing the country from Spuyten Duyvil Creek, along the Hudson to a creek called Amackasson, and then inward to the Bronx River. This was called Colen Donck, and it represents the only patroonship in Westchester, and the first large grant, made in that county. Van der Donck, in spite of the late Indian Massacres, which kept many settlers away, took possession of his land, built a sawmill near Yonkers, on a stream still called Sawmill River, the same on which stood the Indian Village, and a bow-erie or farmhouse not far from the present Van Cortlandt House.

In the fall of 1910, while laying a sewer across the Park, the workmen found the foundation of a house

directly in front of the present one. These foundations of stone were in good repair, about ten feet underground, and still with the whitewash on their interior surface. They showed a house about twenty-five feet deep by fifty feet long, facing east and west, and with a wing at the south side. It was built of flat, red, Holland brick; and, as much black brick was also found, the walls were probably picked out in pattern, in black. The windows had lead frames and exceedingly thin white glass, quite different from the window glass of the later colonial houses. Bits of delft china, and a silver button found, of a kind made in Zeeland, showed that not only the house, but its furnishings, and the dress of its inhabitants, were all of Dutch manufacture.

This is all that remains of Adrian Van der Donck's home, evidently one of the best of its kind. In plan it seems to have been much like Governor Stuyvesant's bowerie, which was built a few years later and stood in Second Avenue, near St. Mark's Church. Van der Donck did not live much at his bowerie. He was too busy in New Amsterdam, for it was he that arranged for the incorporation of that town, and instituted the first municipal organization of what is now the City of New York. He was one of the two lawyers in New Netherland, had been educated at Leyden University, and was well fitted to take a leading part in the government of the colony, while his birth was such as to command respect. To this the city of Yonkers owes its name, for his property there lost the name of Colen Donck, and was called Jonk Heers, or the young nobleman's land. He was a friend of the Indians, and describes

them in a book published in Holland in 1655. Their dress of skins and ornaments of shells, or red dyed hair, their upright carriage, and out-of-door life, are all described; and he exclaims at the fact that they had no set time for meals, but ate when they were hungry. To a conservative Hollander, accustomed to regular hours in all things, such habits must have been the most surprising of any.

The first picture, then, of Van Cortlandt Park is of the fields and woods around the low Dutch farm house of Adrian Van der Donck. Its double pitched roof, covered with dark-red tiles, its walls of richer red, ornamented with lines of black, and its hinged windows, reflected the sunlight from brilliant diamond panes, of thin, perfectly annealed glass. Its wide oaken door, with the upper part flung back, opened on the stoop, which no doubt had seats on each side; and there the patroon could sit, and see his fields beginning to show the effect of labor and planting, or turn to the salt marsh at the south, which would bring remembrances of his old home in Holland, until, perhaps, his reveries were interrupted by a visit from his Indian friends, advancing from out the woods in single file, to squat on the ground beside the stoop. Then no doubt clouds of smoke filled the air; for the Hollanders and Indians had two tastes alike, they loved silence, and they loved tobacco.

It is too long a story to tell why Adrian Van der Donck, after all his work for New Amsterdam, was forced in 1653 to sail for Holland, to plead his own and the colony's cause before the States General. There he was detained until 1655, when, having



gathered much to add to his home on this side, a vessel was loaded ready to sail for America. But he was not to see his comfortable "bowerie" again, for he died and was buried in Holland. He is said to have had children, who were probably very young, as his property was inherited by his wife. This lady made a second marriage soon afterwards, and accompanied her husband, whose name was O'Neale, to his home in Maryland, and for ten years Colen Donck lay quite uncared for.

In 1666 the colony had come under English rule, and all the great land owners proceeded to make their titles perfect by procuring a further grant from the English Crown. Among the patentees who appeared before the Governor were the O'Neales; and after the Indians had been questioned and had replied that Van der Donck had honestly given them all that they asked for the land, the patent for all the Colen Donck property, except the most southern part, which was taken into the Fordham Manor, was made out to the O'Neales. It was then sold in small parcels; and the purchase of a part of it by a man named Tibbits, gives its present name to the brook, through which Van Cortlandt lake empties into Spuyten Duyvil Creek. The ferry, where the Kingsbridge is now, was so much used at this date, that a causeway was built from its terminal to the land. The tide, in rising, formed a second tideway near the Westchester Shore; and across this the causeway was built, it being the first step in the Albany Post Road which was to come later. Travel toward Albany at that time was entirely by water, and not until 1694 was the Kingsbridge built; but

as early as 1673 a post rider crossed the ferry once a month for Boston, to carry the mail between that city and New York, the letters being paid for when received, like any other package. The bridge was built by Frederick Philipse, to take the place of the ferry. This gentleman was Lord of the Manor lying north of the O'Neale patent, and he gradually by purchase added property to that which he already possessed, until his land extended from the Croton River to Spuyten Duyvil Creek.

Frederick Philipse married a Van Cortlandt, from the manor at Croton, for a second wife, and her brother Jacobus proceeded to fall in love with, and marry, Philipse's adopted daughter Eva. To fit themselves out with a home, he purchased from his father-in-law, in 1699, the fifty acres now included in Van Cortlandt Park, the same land which was conveyed to the city in 1889 by the direct descendant of Jacobus and Eva Van Cortlandt. In 1700 another house was built, at a point nearer the stream than Van der Donck's and the brook was dammed to give power for a mill, to be used both for sawing wood and grinding corn. This mill endured until 1889, after which it fell into disrepair, and was finally burnt during a thunder storm in 1901. All that remains of it is one of the mill stones, which, being cut from a single rock, instead of being in several pieces, bound by iron, serves as a base to the sun dial in the present garden.

✓ We must try and understand how far away Jacobus Van Cortlandt lived from any town, to imagine life in Van Cortlandt Park early in the 18th century. To ride from the little city of New York,



all of it below Wall Street, on not the best of roads, the length of Manhattan Island, was really a journey; so his place at Little or lower Yonkers, as it was called, had to support itself, and all living on it. Thus the second picture of Van Cortlandt is a busy place, where all are at work. Sheep must be raised to provide wool, which was spun and woven on the place, flax must be grown to make linen, and both then used to make the clothing needed by Master and Mistress, as well as the family and the slaves, who were the servants. Wood was cut and sawed, not only for building purposes, but also to burn. In the fall, great wagons filled with grain from the outlying lands were brought in, drawn by patient oxen; and it must be ground and stored, or sent away for sale. At the same time of the year the smoke house begins to work; and hams, bacon, and brisket are made ready for the winter's food, while sausages and head cheese are made, to be eaten sooner. Then there was cider, blackberry, and cherry brandy, and currant wine, to make; rose water for flavoring, and innumerable preserved or dried fruits and vegetables; while all the seed for the coming spring planting had to be prepared and carefully kept, and the various roots, vegetables, and apples stored in the deep cellars, dug to keep them from freezing. There was the raising and care of the stock needed on such an estate, while artisans of every kind, from cobblers to wheelwrights, and carpenters to masons, were busy on the place. Van Cortlandt Park was then a Southern plantation, or Western ranch, within what is now the limits of our city; and so successful was the place that, at the

death of Jacobus, his son Frederick van Cortlandt inherited a flourishing estate, and was ready in 1748 to build the present larger house.

By this time New York had begun its commercial existence, and most of the gentlemen of that time were interested in the importation and distribution of the necessities and luxuries demanded by the inhabitants of the Colony. Up to 1700 there had been no money to speak of, and all trade was a matter of exchange of commodities. Now this was changed, and men were growing rich in the sense of the word as used at present. This made much more passing to and fro through Westchester, over the Boston, or the Albany Post Road; and, running as the last did directly past Cortlandt House, many more visitors were brought to the place, while the growing settlement about it and the Manor Houses on the near-by estates, also supplied many guests, who were entertained with that hospitality which made America known throughout the world. It is hard in these days of hotels and rapid transit, to understand the continual and open handed hospitality of the times, when travelers could move no more rapidly than a horse would take them, and inns were few and far between. Then no one was turned from the door, and the fact that the rooms of a house were already filled was no reason for refusing an added guest. For evening parties the guests came from far off; and they were expected to stay the night, the latter part being spent on any couch which could be provided by the host, and sometimes that was the floor.

The wine cellar was stocked by private importation in those days, and well stocked, direct from

Madeira or Spain. So generous was the supply that it was used by some of the gentlemen to purchase goods from the pirates and freebooters, who were able to supply articles unique of their kind, and better and cheaper than those ordinarily brought to the colony; and to them good wine was the best payment. Each householder had his own bottles, with his name blown in the glass; and some of these, marked Van Cortlandt, can be seen now at the house. This then is the third picture of Van Cortlandt, a charming country house, filled with joy and hospitality, sunshine and laughter all about it. The garden filled with flowers behind the box borders, lies in front of the house; and the trees, grown large, shade it on each side, while both in summer and winter gay parties in post-chaise, or in sleigh, come and go to its hospitable doors, always welcome, while, in the dreaded cholera years, it was filled with those seeking refuge.

And so the years rolled by, until the horrors of war arose; for the colonists protested against their government by men so far away and so little concerned for their prosperity. The proprietor of Van Cortlandt at this time, having inherited it from his father in 1750, was a man of such character, that all, of every shade of opinion, trusted him, and it is said that he was even able to influence the British Commanders, at times, in favor of the Americans. Westchester County, however, was, more than other counties, divided in opinion between those who asked for liberty and those who remained loyal to the Crown. These last were somewhat in the majority, and bitter party feeling at once began to show itself;

some of the inhabitants going into the different armies, but a large number remaining to harry one another and the country side.

In 1775 the Sons of Liberty in New York City managed to transport a quantity of cannon from there to Kingsbridge, only to have them spiked and rendered useless by a band of Tories. Afterwards, in anticipation of the arrival of British troops, it was decided to carry more cannon to Kingsbridge; but horses could not be found to do the work, and General Charles Lee, when appealed to, said "Chain twenty damn Tories to each and let them drag them out," evidently thinking that a fit retaliation for the spoiling of the others. The first orders of General Howe, in 1776, when he arrived in New York, sent vessels of war up the Hudson to Kingsbridge, which was then held by the Americans under General Mifflin; and from that time until 1783 that bridge was in the hands of one side or the other, the fighting between them being continual except in winter, when the British retired to quarters on Manhattan Island. Before the battle of White Plains, the Continental army, under Washington, passed from Harlem Heights across Van Cortlandt Park; and, after that battle, a military order of General Howe, dated from the house, shows that it was headquarters for a short time. Augustus Van Cortlandt, who had been Clerk of New York, brought away with him the records of the city; and, as a really safe place, buried them on Vault Hill, just back of the house, the place of burial of his family—while an old servant of the family emptied the wine closet, placing all the bottles in the vault dedicated to the departed Van



Cortlandts. This wine was afterwards brought back to the house, none the worse for its ten years or so in the tomb, and was afterwards called "Resurrection Madeira."

Later, in 1776, General Howe ranged the front of his army at the Kingsbridge, while the Americans placed theirs at Tarrytown, and so they remained for seven years. The intervening land, which a glance at the map will show, was mostly the Van Cortlandt property, was called the Neutral Ground; but, alas, its name did not mean that hostilities ceased there. On the contrary, it was one continual scene of skirmish fighting. Twice during that time the Continental army pushed its outposts to Kingsbridge, and twice the British pushed theirs to Tarrytown; while time out of number strong detachments from either side made forays across the country, always crossing what is now Van Cortlandt Park. Worse almost than the movements of the regular troops were the marauding expeditions of the guerilla companies, formed of the natives, who, as I have said, were opposed in politics. The American sympathizers were called "Skinners"; the Tories, "Cow-boys," this name being gained by their acting as guides and guards to parties of farmers who wished to bring their cattle within the British lines at Fordham, for the price they could get in New York was better and surer than that gotten from the Continentals. These trips were made at night through the woods or over untraveled roads, and always under guard. To head off these parties was the business of the Skinners, and warfare between them was more like that of Indians than of civilized

beings. They had no pity on the inhabitants of the countryside, who woke to be plundered by one party, only to be tortured by the other before nightfall; and, when the two met, the results may be judged of by the story that an oak tree not far from Van Cortlandt House was found one day to have thirty cow-boys hanging from its limbs.

In 1780 Washington returned to Westchester and took command of the Continental Army. Aaron Burr was given command of the neutral ground, and the French officers, who had come to help the Americans, were with General Washington. These foreign officers were most anxious to force battle with Lord Howe, and take New York. If their plans had been carried out, Van Cortlandt might have been a battlefield renowned in history; but the decisive battles were, in the end, fought far away from there, when Vault Hill played its part, for on it was lighted one of the watch fires by which Washington misled the British, who fancied his army still there, after they had started their long march to Virginia, and to victory at Yorktown.

It was in the year 1780 that the Van Cortlandt property was filled with British troops. An officer of the Green Yagers, named Von Kraft, has left a diary of that year, which he passed with his regiment, and two others, in huts, which they built on Spuyten Duyvil Hill, and, as he says, "near Cortlandts." He complains of being kept awake by mosquitoes, and of the lack of food, and especially that they had neither beer nor vinegar. Whether one was considered an equivalent of the other, as a beverage, he does not say. In August they held a



large Church parade, under the apple trees at Van Cortlandt; but by October they had evidently left the house, as he records the fact of an attack on his outposts by some rebels who came from "Cortlandts." These rebels gave the sentries a sound drubbing, took their horses and their arms, and then let them go free. Though pursued, they were not caught, at which the captain says the Yagers were much ashamed. This was on the 11th of October; but on the 22nd the English were back at Van Cortlandt house again, while, on the 26th, they patrolled as far as the Philipse Manor House in Tarrytown; and by December Van Cortlandt House was the headquarters for Sir Henry Erskine, who, in conjunction with a force going up the Hudson by boat, marched from there to Tarrytown, to crush the Continentals, only to find that they had left two days before. It was these Hessian Troops, the Green Yagers and Emmerich's Chasseurs, who fought with and exterminated the band of Indians who are buried in the park, in what is called Indian Field.

Beside the regular troops and the guerilla bands who harried the neutral ground, a company of devoted men acted as guides and as spies for the Americans, who should not be forgotten. They must have been well known at Van Cortlandt House. The names of several of the best known were Oakley, Odell, Young and Dyckman, a name kept alive by a street and a station on the subway. There were two brothers Oakley, and two brothers Dyckman; and as one of each couple had a tavern, one on Manhattan Island, and one on the Post Road in Westchester, the brothers had the best of chances to

gather news, and outdo the enemy. They were not afraid of a fight, indeed gloried in it, as one of their adventures show. Three of these men were guiding a company of Continentals, who were in pursuit of a party of British troops, guarding some cattle to Fordham. They failed to catch their prey, but were persuaded by a unanimous request of the guides to follow across the Van Cortlandt property, and into the camp at Fordham. There the Hessians had retired into a house for the night. Nevertheless, the guides who were in advance, stole up on the sentries, whom they seized and gagged; and then Dyckman climbed up on the windowsill, and tried to look through the crack of the heavy shutters. All the soldiers within were asleep, except four who were playing cards. These men were disturbed by the movement of the shutter, and Dyckman, seeing he had no time to lose, threw himself through the glass of the window, falling full length on the floor. He was instantly followed by the other guides, and their rather surprising entrance so paralysed the soldiers that there was time to pick themselves up and unlock the door for the American troops, before they were attacked. All the British were taken prisoners, and led quietly off without alarming the rest of the camp.

This will give some idea of the fourth picture of Van Cortlandt, in the seven years that it was the centre of the neutral ground. Its beautiful fields a wreck, its woods filled with Skinners, or Cow-boys, both utterly unthinking of the rights or life of any one. Its mill still working, sometimes at the order of the British, and sometimes at those of the Con-

tinentials, but always under such orders, so that the owners could not profit by its work. At times, the old-time hospitality is shown. Generals Washington and Rochambeau dined at Van Cortlandt House on January 2nd, 1781, as the guests of Mr. Van Cortlandt; and no doubt at other times, there were guests of the same quality; but even though the house itself and its inhabitants escaped real hurt, they must have been made unhappy by the miseries suffered by all about them.

In November, 1783, Washington was again at Van Cortlandt House, where he supped and slept before leaving the next morning, surrounded by a brilliant staff of American and foreign officers, to ride to New York, on its evacuation by the British.

Since that time the Van Cortlandt House has been the home of the family until 1889, when it passed to the city. During those years it was kept up in the same hospitable way, a way inherited, like other virtues, in our older families. Among the distinguished guests were the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William the Fourth of England, and Admiral Digby of the British Navy. This gentleman left behind him two rather impressive black and white fowl, made in India and captured on a Spanish Man-of-War, called Vultures, though of rather a conventional type. These birds ornamented the gate-posts of the place for years, and may now be seen in one of the rooms of the house, attracting much attention, in as far as they are so very different from any known fowl, even transcending our own national bird as he appears on the shield of the United States.

In 1896 the city leased Van Cortlandt House to the Society of Colonial Dames of the State of New York, and by them it has been set apart and dedicated to giving the school children and public of New York some idea of what life was in the days of the Colonies.

To achieve this end, a special Act of Legislature was necessary and this was gotten by the work of a few devoted members of the Society, headed by its first president, Mrs. Howard Townsend, under whose ennobling influence the Society had so grown in its few years of existence, that it was ready to undertake successfully the work entailed in the holding of this house as a trust, for the City, and for the public.

To her indomitable energy, which brought every influence possible to bear in Albany, the public is indebted for a museum, visited each year, by from seventy-five to a hundred thousand children, and its work towards Americanizing the many foreigners among those children, is acknowledged to be of the greatest importance, by the other museums, and by the teachers of the City. It stands also as an added honor to the wisdom of Mrs. Townsend, whose name was already known, in the annals of the Women's Auxiliary, to the Sanitary Commission of the Civil War, and by her services at Mount Vernon, the home of Washington, the saving of which from ruin, is perhaps the greatest monument to the power of women's work in the United States. This sacredly historic spot was first acquired by a corporation of women, representing the States of the Union, in 1856, but the breaking out of the Civil War, stopped



any work of improvement upon it, although it was held to be neutral ground, and passed through those years of conflict, unharmed by the soldiers of either side.

By 1876, the year that Mrs. Townsend was appointed vice-regent at Mount Vernon, she had already shown her interest in the work, as the head of a Mount Vernon Aid Society, in this State, and through this Society, passed the first really large sum of money to the endowment, while by 1879, this was added to so materially, that the special work of her State, the renovation and furnishing of the Banquet Hall, was assured. In 1891 Mrs. Townsend was elected Regent in Chief, and by that time, owing largely to her wisdom and energy, Mount Vernon had begun to be, what we know it has since become, under her care, a fitting resting place for America's greatest hero, and the end of many a pilgrimage, from the world over. Mrs. Townsend was honorary Regent of Mount Vernon, and Honorary President of the Colonial Dames of the State of New York, and of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America until her death, but no honor shown her can be a full expression of the gratitude and admiration the women of those Societies feel they owe to one whose patriotism and public spirit suggested their work, and whose wisdom guided their course and whose unstinted affection and approbation helped their efforts and rewarded their success.

In May, 1897, the Van Cortlandt House was opened to the public, furnished as a residence of a Colonial family, though with rooms set aside for museum exhibits. In these rooms were to be found

the Revolutionary relics picked up about the park property, the remains of the many forays made across it; or, as in the case of a collection of bone buttons partly cut or entirely finished, the reminder of those Hessians who lived in huts on Spuyten Duyvil Hill for so long a time that they started a button manufactory.

And thus we reach the last picture of Van Cortlandt. Its fields still lie green and fertile about the house, while the wooded hills rise on each side. But no longer are they used to grow the corn, or shelter the game used by the Indians, or to support the patriarchal surroundings of its early proprietors. Tibbits brook flowed is changed, for that part which sunlight and shade, and find rest and recreation within its borders. Only the marsh through which Tibbits brook flowed is changed, for that part which falls within the Park boundaries has been redeemed, and is now a garden.

This garden is in the same place as the one which Frederick Van Cortlandt laid out; and for a second time the land is reclaimed from its swampy condition. In the older garden, the terrace at the west side was planted with apple, plum and pear trees, while that to the east was filled with flowering shrubs, such as althea, snowballs, lilacs and flowering currants. Across the top of the north terrace ran a hedge of box trees, planted to keep the north winds away from the garden; and the huge size this hedge attained gave rise to the idea that the air, blowing over it, caused the curious disintegration of the glass in the windows of the house. To the west of that building a lawn stretched beyond the present



Broadway, then called the "Turnpike," to the old Albany Road; and, on the west, the entrance to a lane which ran down the hill to the mill, and on to the farmer's house, was guarded by gate posts, crowned by the vultures already mentioned. The dyking of the lowland then was more perfect than the present draining of the garden, for the land to the south of it was in good grass for hay and grazing while now it is useless swamp land, and can only be crossed by the causeway on the southern boundary of the park.

The garden has been a pet scheme of the Society of Colonial Dames, who have watched with interest the draining of the land by canals and its filling in with loam. Of its kind it is the only one in the parks about New York; and it is becoming more perfect each year, so that the hope that it may in time be the model for more old-fashioned gardens does not seem misplaced. Van Cortlandt House stands firm and strong in spite of its many years of life, and its door is still hospitably opened to all visitors. Beside it lie two cannons from Fort Independence, perhaps some of those sent from New York by General Charles Lee; and another reminder of the time when Van Cortlandt was neutral ground is a window from one of the sugar houses, though not the oldest, used as prisons in the city, when every large building, even the churches, were filled with American prisoners.

One of the reasons for the existence of the Society of Colonial Dames, is to stimulate a spirit of true patriotism and a genuine love of country, and to impress upon the young the obligation of honoring

the memory of those men of the Colonial period, who, by their rectitude, courage and self-denial, laid the foundation of this nation; and the holding of Van Cortlandt House in trust for the public by the Colonial Dames of the State of New York, beside being the preservation of an old and historic building, is an effort to teach such history. The land bears the name of a family whose roll of honor shows a Governor of the State, an Officer high in the ranks of the Continental Army, and, earlier still, a man who filled with honor almost every office in the gift of the Colony. To study their lives, and those of others of the same name, in the long list of the men who, from Colonial times have filled their years with right living, would teach much that I have mentioned; but when we turn to the history of the ground in the last two hundred and fifty years, and add to that the history of others of the Colonies to which the many exhibits draw attention, it seems not too much to claim a great usefulness for the Museum, and to hope that it may be open to the public for all time.

## A STUDY OF VAN CORTLANDT HOUSE

By NORMAN MORRISON ISHAM, F. A. I. A.

The taking of the Dutch Colony by the English in 1666 marked the beginning of a change in the architecture of the New Netherlands. This change seems, however, to have been of exceedingly slow development, and, in the remoter settlements, of almost no effect. The farmers and the village people generally would have little to say to the English fashions. The mercantile class would be the first to show the effect of the new style, and even this was probably very slow to take up with it. The commercial supremacy of England, as the eighteenth century grew older, began, however, to show itself in the buildings of the wealthier classes, at any rate in the large towns, which show dwellings like the Van Rensselaer and the Schuyler house at Albany. Another instance of the English character of even the later country dwelling built when the wealth of the family had increased, is the new mansion erected on the banks of the Mosholu Brook by Frederick Van Cortlandt in 1748.

Yet the Van Cortlandt mansion is not thoroughly English. It has an English dress, indeed, for the State apartments are quite in the new manner, but some of the more domestic rooms show stronger Dutch influence, till we come to the kitchen which is the most Dutch of all.

The plan of the building has the L-shape which, whether it was built at one time, or was the result of additions, was beloved of the Dutch craftsmen.

Neither wing of the "L" is more than one room deep. In the main block, which faces about south, are two rooms, an East Parlor and a West Parlor, which have each a chimney, and which are separated by an entry or passage containing the principal stairs. The fireplace of the West Parlor is on the outer wall of the house, and that of the East Parlor is on the same wall which is continued eastward along the south side of the passage, or entry, in the "L." This passage, which also contains a staircase, separates the East Parlor from what was probably the original Dining Room at the north end of the "L."

Both these stairs are carried up into the garret. There is a little Dutch feeling in the main flight, but it is not obtrusive. The strongest touch of it is in the balusters of the last run of the staircase in the passage. These are sawed out of boards and not turned, but the profile is quite Netherlandish.

The West Parlor has now a late mantel of 1835 thrust into the old panelling, while the fireplace which it surrounds has been built into the older and larger one. The whole end of the room is panelled, with a closet in each side of the chimney, and this work is probably contemporary with the house. It seems to be entirely English in its character, and shows that this room was originally meant to be the finest in the house.

If the East Parlor was originally panelled like the West Parlor that panelling was soon taken out

and a mantel put in which is a beautiful example of the Georgian manner, and which very probably was imported. It seems certain, however, that this was not at first the principal room, that it had originally no panelling at all and that the mantel was put in only when it was thought proper, after fashion had changed, to finish up the apartment, so as to make it the chief room of the house. Our ancestors did much more of this piecemeal finishing than we have yet given them credit for. Indeed, we are learning something new about their building methods almost continually.

At some later time the room was done over in the style of the Greek Revival, with a plaster cornice.

In restoring this room it was determined, without disturbing the mantel of course, to panel it as it might have been panelled from floor to ceiling, on all four sides, with the raised and bevelled panels which succeeded those with the heavy bolection mouldings so much liked by Wren.

The "L" was not occupied by the Kitchen, as it would have been in a colonial house of the English type, but by the Dining Room in which the present woodwork is later than 1800. The Dutch tradition prevailed and the Kitchen, in many ways the most interesting room in the house, was put in the Cellar. Its fireplace, with an oven at one side, is a veritable cavern, though it is small compared to some of the seventeenth century specimens. There is no mantel-tree, but a bent iron bar sustains the very flat elliptical arch which spans the opening. The ceiling is



not plastered and the beams of the floor above, 5x10 nearly, and about 11 inches apart are plainly to be seen with all the marks of the broad-axes of the old workmen. It is a mistake to call these old cuts adze marks. The adze was a tool for use when the surface to be cut was horizontal and could not be turned to a vertical position, and thus could not be attacked with the axe. It is more a shipwright's than a housewright's tool.

In the chambers the west room is panelled on the fireplace end with considerable elaboration, while the East Room is quite plain, showing indeed, only a mantel, a fact which supports the theory that the East Parlor below it was originally a very plain room and that the mantel, one of the best on the seaboard, was added later. The North Chamber is more elaborate again than the East Room, though not so much so as the West Room, which was evidently the State Sleeping Apartment. It is this North Room which has been fitted up as the principal apartment of a prosperous Dutchman of the late seventeenth century. The transition from the negative type to that which came in during the eighteenth century, under the English rule, can thus be very clearly seen within this one building.

In the garret of the front block are two rooms, one of which has been fitted up with New England panelling. In the "L" garret there are several rooms which probably do not go back to the original house. The Dutch flavor here, however, is more pronounced. There are two doors and some hardware which are strongly of that character. Perhaps the doors were brought from the story below, for it is



not certain that the present roof and garret are original, even if there were rooms in the third story at the beginning. A hip roof, however, was to be expected, as in the Glenn-Sanders house at Scotia, and the pitch of the roof is what we should look for.

It has been the general intention to keep the house furnished as it would have been in its prime—the time from the date of its building to the Revolution. The Dutch Room, of course, is a thing by itself, and even in the other rooms some fine seventeenth century pieces have been displayed for their educational value. Now and then, also, a late piece of exceptional merit has been used.

In the East Parlor a fine secretary of about 1760 stands between the windows on the eastern wall. It once belonged to Mr. Canfield and is very probably an early piece by John Goddard, of Newport, one of the finest of our Colonial cabinet makers. It is the eighth of his secretaries known to be in existence.

The lowboy between the southern windows was made by William Savery, of Philadelphia, another noted Colonial craftsman, whose advertisement is pasted in the top drawer.

All Sorts of Chairs and  
Joiners Work  
Made and Sold by  
*WILLIAM SAVERY*  
At the Sign of the  
Chair, a little be-  
low the Market, in  
Second Street.  
PHILADELPHIA

Over this piece is a fine gilt mirror of Chippendale type.

Two other Chippendale pieces are the elegant sofa against the west wall, north of the door, and the delicately beautiful Pembroke table in the corner next to the chimney.

The middle of the room is occupied by two wonderful Chippendale seats and a magnificent tripod or tip table with a pie-crust and claw-and-ball feet—an astonishing specimen—a present from General Nathanael Greene, of Rhode Island, to Madam Van Vechten, of Finderne, New Jersey, at whose house he stayed in the winter of Valley Forge. From the Misses Frelinghuysen, descendants of Madam Van Vechten, the table came to Mrs. Margaret Elmen-dorf Sloan, whose children gave it to the Society of Colonial Dames of the State of New York.

In the center of the present Dining Room, the old West Parlor, is an American gate-legged or “thousand-legged” table with an oval top. It has beside it two very fine walnut chairs, one with cane seat and back, of about 1700, the other with a banister-back, of a little later date.

Another seventeenth century American piece is the fine oak chest with one drawer. This stands between the southern windows and has beside it still another early example in the very interesting butterfly table on the west wall. On the other side is a Turkey work chair that can hardly be excelled.

On the east wall is an extremely good six-legged highboy with a cushion-front drawer just under its flat top.

In the East Parlor Chamber there is, on the door to the north stair hall, a very curious bolt which, by means of a cord, could be released by a person in bed without getting up, so that the servant could come in to make the wood fire in the morning.

On the south wall of this room is a fine block front dressing table of mahogany, possibly by John Goddard, while the walnut period is represented by the highboy with its curved broken pediment. Near by is a notable "wing" or easy chair with claw-and-ball feet.

The Dining Room Chamber—once the West Parlor Chamber—contains a bed of the early eighteenth century with hangings covering all its posts, as was the fashion at that date.

Over the mantel is a mirror of 1680. Near the bed is an excellent example of a couch or day-bed, the precursor of the couch of the present time, and against the wall stands an inlaid lowboy.

The Dutch Room has a very fine painted Kas cupboard, and a most interesting model of a Dutch sloop. This model, which dates from 1705, came from the counting room of an old shipbuilding firm after the last member had died. It was wont to be taken out and blessed whenever the real vessel which it represented put out to sea.

The sleigh is Dutch also, that is, Holland Dutch, and was brought over by the first Van Rennselaer who came to this country.

In the further left hand or northwest corner is an excellent example of a ship's treasure chest of painted iron—one of the kind which figures in the fabled burials of money by Captain Kidd. Above it is a

very noteworthy Dutch china cupboard with a curving, well carved, and with glazed doors.

On the floor is a real Dutch rug or carpet.

A beautiful maple desk and a wagon chair, as it was called, are notable exhibits in the Southeast Chamber of the Garret.

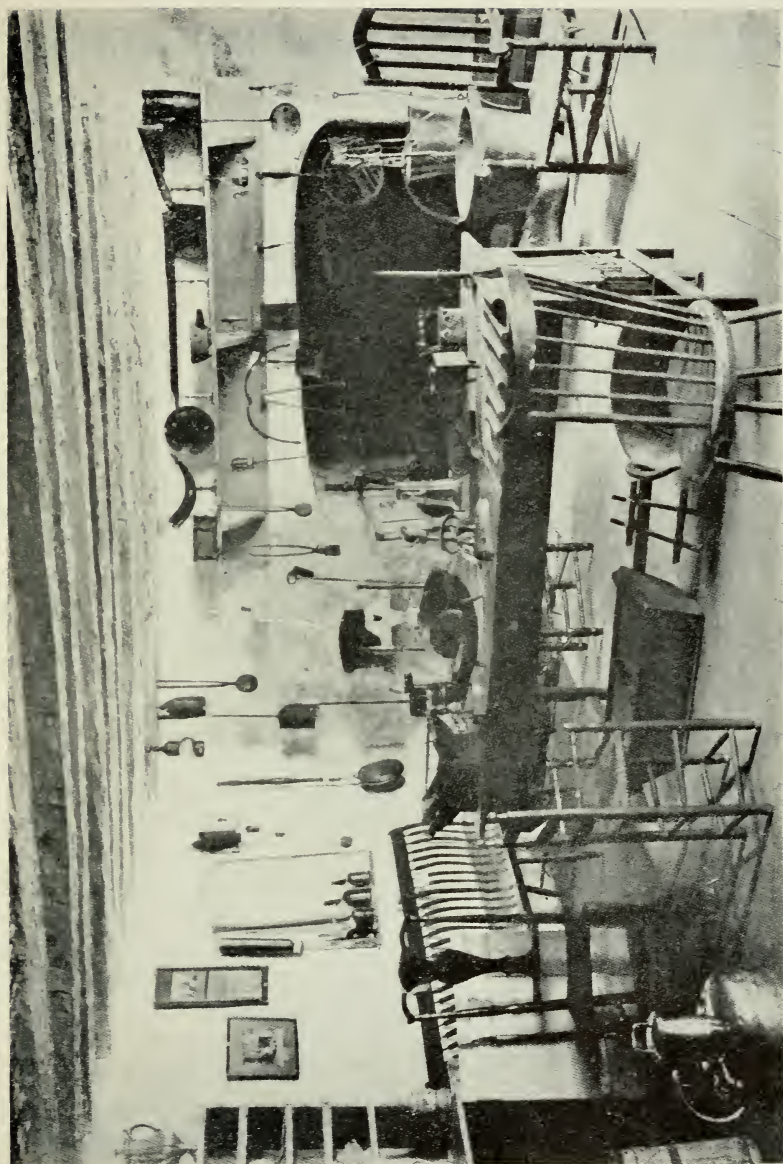
Perhaps the most interesting piece in the Southwest Garret is the Doll's House made for a member of the Homans family, of Boston, in 1744. It is now being filled with furniture which reproduces in miniature that in the Van Cortlandt House itself.

There are also some remarkable early toys in this room, a cradle covered with leather and a very good gate-legged table.

The preservation of this house means far more than the maintaining of a museum, and thus of an object lesson in the domestic life of our fathers. Such a house is not a mere landmark in our social or military history, it is a monument in the history of our architecture as well. Even with the restorations which have been made for the purpose of showing special periods in the manner of a museum, the house is practically undisturbed and forms, just as a fabric, just as a matter of design and construction, a most important and valuable example of the Georgian or English type of Colonial house, tinged in the most interesting way with the Dutch influence of the former New Amsterdam.

NORMAN MORRISON ISHAM.





THE KITCHEN





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